

# HOPES

For Kurdish-Turkish Dialogue?



## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Ms. Sehabat Tuncel,  
Kurdish MP of Turkey's  
Parliament

KURDISH SHIA ALLIANCE p.15

KURDS IN IRAN p.12



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# TURKEY'S NEW POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

– CAN THE KURDS STILL BE IGNORED?

**T**he land that comprises present-day Turkey has reinvented itself many times over the centuries, undergoing a number of extreme changes which yield today's Republic and all of its inherent contradictions. In past incarnations, the ancient city of Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), has been the capital of a number of officially Christian empires (beginning with the Roman Empire under Theodosius I) and the capital of a Muslim empire that also functioned as a caliphate (the Ottoman Empire).

Today it is the business and cultural center of Turkey, a state founded on staunchly secular principles which officially places limitations on public expressions of religious belief.

More than ever, Turkey today is a land in flux. It's imperfect democratic system, complete with various measures that help insure that the military has some measure of control over the policies of the country, has yielded a number of interesting and noteworthy changes over the past few decades. On a number of occasions, Turkish citizens have cast their votes and overturned the existing political system, and, on a number of other occasions, the Turkish military has stepped in to enforce its will upon the democratically-elected government.

Over the past few years, we have witnessed the rise of a new powerhouse in Turkish politics, the Justice

and Development Party (AKP), a party which by definition as an Islamist party contradicts the founding ideology of the secular, Western Turkish Republic. Indeed, the AKP rose to power democratically by receiving votes not only from religious voters but also from those looking for a protest vote and finding it in a party that preached moral values. Even many Kurds, motivated by either religious fervor or anger at the establishment reflected by the Republican

number of interesting developments in the Turkish political scene over the last few years.

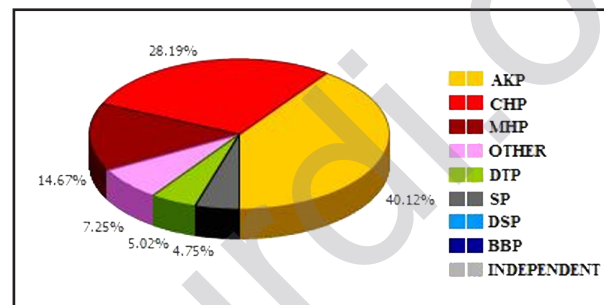
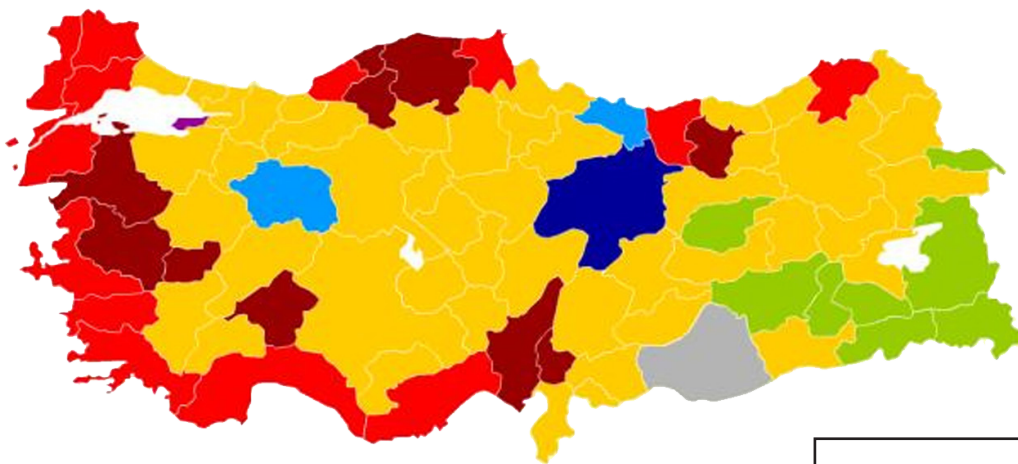
Whole swaths of Turkey are now firmly in the camp of one political party or another. While the AKP received far more votes than any of its opponents, it failed in its stated goal of breaking into the old strongholds of other political parties, such as Izmir for the CHP (where the CHP won 55% of votes for

**"More than ever, Turkey today is a land in flux. It's imperfect democratic system, complete with various measures that help insure that the military has some measure of control over the policies of the country, has yielded a number of interesting and noteworthy changes over the past few decades."**

People's Party (CHP), cast their votes for the AKP.

Since it's founding in 2001, the AKP has solidified its role as Turkey's dominant political party. The AKP is no longer a curious newcomer to the world of politics, it is a major part of the Turkish political framework. And while dominant, it is but one player in the complicated, high stakes game that is Turkish politics. The results of the recent municipal elections in Turkey explain the current state of Turkey's political system, and, in many ways, are the culmination of a

greater municipal mayor) or Diyarbakir for the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) (where they won 66% of votes for greater municipal mayor). The CHP came out in control of much of the western coast of Turkey, spanning all the way from Içel to Edirne. This reflects a strong backing from Turkey's Kemalist elite, who have traditionally been staunch adherents of the Republic's founding ideology and, in keeping with this ideology, are generally Western-leaning and secular. Many in this group are fairly wealthy, relatively speaking, and are genuinely alarmed



and even dismayed by the rise of the AKP, a group that they fear is steering Turkey dangerously far from its founding principles. The more right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP) won a number of provinces in the west and, together with the CHP and CHP offshoot DSP (Democratic Left Party), controls much of Turkey's northern border.

Meanwhile, much of the rest of Turkey, throughout Anatolia, cast their votes for the AKP, demonstrating a clear division between the secular elite of certain regions who have been members of the Kemalists establishment for decades and a newly resurgent class of more traditional Turkish citizens who, over the past decade, have become more educated and more mobilized. While the CHP and MHP represent certain regions on Turkey's borders, the Anatolian heartland is dominated by the AKP.

The one exception to this general rule is the predominantly Kurdish southeast, a land which many Kurds identify as northern Kurdistan. Despite the best efforts of the AKP, the poorly-funded but well organized DTP emerged as the voice of the southeast, scoring victories by large margins in certain strongholds such as Diyarbakir and capturing others previously held by other parties, such as Iğdır near Turkey's border with Armenia. A cursory glance at Turkey's new political map makes it difficult to deny that the DTP

is the voice of the Kurds of Turkey.

The various factions that comprise the Turkish establishment, including the government (AKP), the Kemalists political establishment (CHP), and the military, have, in the past, taken great pains to ostracize members of the DTP, accusing them of being complicit in "terrorism", a reference to the activities of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Many MPs, including the Prime Minister, refused to shake hands with DTP parliamentarians and military generals

newspaper *Milliyet* published an interview with PKK military leader Murat Karayilan following journalist Hasan Cemal's visit to the Qendil mountains with the headline, "Karayilan: we have hope for peace." In another interesting development, following the publication of this interview, Cemal was reportedly contacted by the offices of several of Turkey's most influential policymakers to discussions – President Gül, Prime Minister Erdoğan, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, though his meetings with

**"Despite the best efforts of the AKP, the poorly-funded but well organized DTP emerged as the voice of the southeast, scoring victories"**

refused to appear at events attended by DTP members. Now that the DTP has truly established itself as the voice of Turkey's Kurdish citizens and the dominant power in a whole section of the country, it is a lot more difficult to ignore. Slowly but surely, it seems that some of the larger factions in the Turkish establishment are realizing this as recently CHP Deputy Secretary General Mesut Değer met with DTP chairman Ahmet Türk to discuss the Kurdish issue. Almost concurrently, a report which stated that Prime Minister Erdoğan himself was preparing to meet representatives of the DTP. At nearly the same time, the Turkish

all three were apparently postponed. The results of this year's municipal elections were no surprise and were not revolutionary. Rather, they were an accurate snapshot of the new political map of Turkey, a summary of the complex and ever-evolving reality of one of the world's more curious democratic systems. As the heirs of the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the powerbrokers of Turkey's political world react to these developments, it seems that they may indeed be forced to address Turkey's Kurdish question in a more direct manner than ever before. Indeed, this may already be happening.



# MS. SEBAHAT TUNCEL

*Kurdish MP of Turkey's Parliament and Istanbul Deputy for the Democratic Society Party (DTP)*



**Ankara, Turkey** – Kurdish Herald recently had the opportunity to speak with Ms. Sebahat Tuncel, a Kurdish member of Turkey's parliament and Istanbul Deputy for the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), for an exclusive interview regarding topics that included the Kurdish question and the electoral success of her party in the recent nationwide local elections. Ms. Tuncel is the official foreign affairs representative for the DTP. In 2006, she was imprisoned on charges of a crime against the unity of the state. She was released in 2007 through parliamentary immunity after winning a seat in Istanbul and became the first person in Turkey's history to be elected from prison.

**Kurdish Herald:** How would you characterize the reaction of the Turkish government and military to the DTP's recent successes in the March 2009 Turkish municipal elections?

**Sebahat Tuncel:** The [Turkish] state employed all its branch and organs with the expectation of defeating DTP in the Kurdish region in the March 2009 elections. Different groups, such as soldiers, governors, even some members of the other Turkish parties, worked with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) aiming to meet this expectation. All of these actors worked very hard against DTP. For instance, they gave free food, donated laundry machines, and gave money to people. It was important for the AKP to win the Kurdish provinces. If they succeeded, the Turkish government could tell everyone (inside Turkey and throughout the world) that AKP represents the Kurds, and the Kurds do not have the problems and grievances that DTP always brings to the table.

Of course, the reaction of the government and the military to the results of the elections has been, indeed, negative. State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek, stated that the results demonstrated that the DTP has “pushed to the border of Armenia.” Chief of General Staff Ilker Basbuğ said that “the votes that DTP received should be read correctly.” The AKP, similarly, claimed that DTP got the victory by using violence against people. So, generally, we witnessed intolerance of the DTP’s success from the [Turkish] state.

**KH:** Is there any group in particular in the Turkish government that you think is a dependable partner for dialogue in seeking some solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey?

**ST:** More discussions took place after the March 29th elections. President Abdullah Gül had some statements on this issue. He stated that “there will be good things,” and “there is an immediate need for the solution for the Kurdish problem.” However, he has not explained what the solution would be like. This lack of clarity persists.

On the other hand, DTP expressed that there was a chance for a solution. The March 2009 elections actually created an opportunity as the DTP doubled their seats in municipalities. However, the AKP approached DTP with violence in the retaliation for their defeat in the elections. The government has arrested hundreds of DTP members and additionally, the Turkish military conducted operations against the PKK. Thus, it is clear that Turkish government seeks a solution without Kurds involved.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan continues his negative attitudes against the Kurds. He still does not recognize the political rights of 20 million Kurds. Neither the AKP nor the other parties have an actual project for the solution to the Kurdish question. Both sides continue to approach the Kurdish question in a traditional way, such as defining the Kurdish question as a “terror” problem. The politicians continue to obey the military. Therefore, I think that Turkey’s political internal dynamics alone are unable to solve the Kurdish question. We believe that Turkey inevitably needs more extensive international support and advice to find a way to reach a solution.

**KH:** What is the status of recent court cases pending against you and other DTP parliamentarians? Who is behind

allegations against you and your colleagues? And to what extent do these court cases interfere with your work as a parliamentarian?

**ST:** Cases attempting to close the DTP continue. It is like the Sword of Damocles on our neck – the Turkish state has continuously been trying to suppress us by using these cases.

There are currently about 380 cases in Turkey calling for the revoking of immunity of MPs. Of these cases, 286 are against DTP MPs. The cases against the others are mostly based on charges for corruption, bribery, or even murder, while for us the cases are based only on the expression of our political ideas. These cases have deepened the Kurdish problem and have revealed the double standard and unjust manipulation in the interpretation of the Turkish law when it comes to Kurdish rights.

**KH:** What role is the DTP currently playing in the organization of a pan-Kurdish conference in Erbil, and what would its aims be?

**ST:** There has been a long discussion over this conference in Turkey, with a plan to disqualify the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) from the conference. Nevertheless, the March 2009 elections dismissed such plans. We hoped that that this conference would highlight the unity of the Kurds and call for a project for the freedom and democratization of the countries where Kurds live. At this moment, it seems that the conference has been delayed. However, we think that this conference should take a place and many Kurds from the four parts should attend it. It is exciting to have this first Kurdish conference. With this conference we can send a message to the world as a united Kurdish people.

**KH:** As the foreign affairs representative of the DTP, how do you see Turkey’s relationships with Iraq’s central government and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) developing?

**ST:** I think that the Turkey-KRG relationship is very important both in terms of politics and commercial relations. On the other hand, we would not accept any type of relationship that would adversely affect reaching a solution for the Kurdish question in Turkey. In this relationship, we expect that both sides take consideration for the interests of the Kurds in Turkey as well.

Even though Turkey-KRG relations do not seem stable, there is still a chance

for a healthy and normal relationship only if the safety of the Northern Kurds [Kurds in Turkey] is secured. We want to make clear that our Kurdish brothers and sisters in Iraq will not have freedom until the 20 million Kurds in Turkey do as well.

**KH:** What are your views on Turkey’s European Union accession efforts? Do you believe that the current government is focused on achieving EU membership?

**ST:** We, the DTP, are a determined supporter of the European Union membership process of Turkey because social and political reforms and changes in Turkey have not occurred easily and the implementation of reforms for the membership of the EU may help bring about positive change in Turkey. As it is known, Turkey is still administrated by a military coup Constitution. For instance, there is a law, the Law of Struggle Against Terror and it has been affecting the lives of all the Kurds, young and old alike. With the membership of the EU, this law can be reformed. Today, there are many Kurdish children are standing trial, facing a possible 25 year prison sentence, because they threw stones at Turkish police. There are almost 3,000 children who are standing trial for such accusations.

However, the Turkish government doesn’t seem to focus on the achievement of the [candidacy] membership of the EU. They only talk but do not follow through with action.

Interview conducted by Servet Tosun and Natsumi Ajiki for Kurdish Herald at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in Ankara.



# IS TURKEY-PKK DIALOGUE ON THE HORIZON?

by Servet Tosun and Jeff Allan

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was founded as the 1970s drew to a close, marking a turning point in the Kurdish national movement just as Turkish military oppression of dissident groups – such as Kurds and leftists – was at its height. Cengiz Candar of the Turkish newspaper, *Radikal*, has described the PKK as a consequence of the “Kurdish problem” that emerged soon after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. This “problem” has given birth to a number of revolts in various incarnations, and has continued with violence that has claimed thousands of lives over the last 25 years. Candar states that the PKK is not a single organization, but it is a well-networked entity. While their leader, Abdullah Öcalan, has been imprisoned for over 10 years, the military cadres of the PKK are still well-organized and active in the Qendil Mountains straddling the Iraq-Iran border and other areas near the borders of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. A significant portion of the PKK's financial resources come from its civil organizations supported by Diaspora Kurds in Europe, and the PKK enjoys the psychological support of many Kurds in Turkey.

In the beginning, the PKK demanded a free and independent Kurdish nation-state, or a Kurdistan, that includes parts of present-day Turkey. However, after 1993, it changed its core objective and sought a solution to the Kurdish question within the borders of the modern-day countries that occupy portions of the Kurds' historical homeland. Turkey had neither accepted nor acknowledged the change in the PKK's objectives, and refused to open communication with the rebel group despite various overtures that included the PKK's unilateral ceasefires or the official surrender of small numbers of PKK political and military personnel. However, as the conflict between the PKK and Turkey continues, a close watch on the media in Turkey indicates that changes may very well be taking place.

Last month, a well-known Turkish journalist, Hasan Cemal, conducted an interview with the active PKK leader, Murat Karayilan. The interview was published in a popular mainstream (and somewhat right-wing) Turkish newspaper, *Milliyet*, and has received considerable politi-

cal attention. In this interview, Karayilan emphasized the importance of the change in the Turkish side. Later, he commented in the popular Arabic newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat* that, “In the past, Turkey used to block its ears to our calls and peaceful initiatives. This time, however, all the media outlets in Turkey are discussing and openly debating our issue, especially after the appeal I made personally

through the Turkish journalist. The reaction of the Turkish side to this interview seems, generally, positive.”

In the interview with Hasan Cemal, Karayilan explains that the PKK is an inexpugnable movement, as has been proven over the last 25 years of conflict with Turkey. Given such a reality, neither side should attack the other, but rather, a dialogue for a peaceful

PKK leader, Murat Karayilan (left) is interviewed by Hasan Cemal (right) from *Milliyet* – Qendil Mountains





Pro-Kurdish DTP leader, Ahmet Türk (left), meets with Turkish President Abdullah Gül (right) - May 2009



settlement should begin between Öcalan and Turkey. If this is not acceptable for Turkey, Karayilan explains, Turkey can open a communication with the active PKK leaders. If Turkey still resists, then

the most prominent actor. President Gül has stated that the Kurdish question is Turkey's most important issue. During his recent visit to Kyrgyzstan, he also talked about his intention to bring to

representation for the Kurds. In addition, Erdoğan emphasizes the importance of a reconciliation process that includes making the Kurdish general public feel that Turks are sympathetic to the Kurds. If none of these objectives are accomplished, he says, stable peace will not come. Erdoğan asserts, "The general goodness of Turkey depends on the general goodness of the Kurds. Unless Kurds meet peace and prosperity, Turkey [will not] achieve peace and prosperity. Unless Kurds become free, Turkey [will not] be free."

**"The general goodness of Turkey depends on the general goodness of the Kurds. Unless Kurds meet peace and prosperity, Turkey [will not] achieve peace and prosperity. Unless Kurds become free, Turkey [will not] be free."**

Turkey can negotiate with the democratically-elected members of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP). If none of them are reconcilable for Turkey, Turkey can establish a dialogue with a so-called "wise man committee."

Karayilan states in the interview that the PKK wants to negotiate a "democratic autonomous Kurdistan" in Turkey, which would include strengthened local governments under the reformed local authorities law. "This demand should not scare Turkey," Karayilan says, and he further explains that it would not affect the borders and the unitary structure of the Turkish Republic.

Karayilan's comments received provoked reactions from both Turkish politicians and the media. The Turkish government has begun discussions of a possible political resolution to the "Kurdish question" in Turkey. Among the various politicians, civil organizations, academics and media who have responded, President Abdullah Gül is

together the various political parties represented in Turkish parliament, as well as a designated a group of officials, to find a solution to the Kurdish question.

Among the officials who have been identified for such a task is the Minister of Interior, Besir Atalay. His comments during a news conference have also shown some changes in the nature of Turkey's political culture. In response to a question with regarding Karayilan's interview, Atalay said that, "We see an importance in any comment about solving the Kurdish question and observe everything that is happening carefully, and we are taking careful notes."

On May 30, 2009, Mustafa Erdoğan, a Turkish columnist from the daily newspaper, *Star*, suggested that giving rights to the Kurds is an absolute condition for bringing peace. He wrote that this condition could be fulfilled only through the constitutionalization of cultural rights, a decentralization of the government, and the creation of easier access for political

Murat Karayilan also referred to a reconciliation process between Kurds and Turks in an interview with the *Times* of London. He expressed that both sides will bear responsibility for reaching rapprochement: "Both Turkish and Kurdish societies have been damaged. Both sides have to forgive one another...Forgiveness is necessary for peace. Kurds and Turks must open a new white page."

Other writers, such as Mümtazer Türköne from *Zaman*, celebrate the possibility of ending the violence in Turkey but provide warnings. Türköne emphasizes that any delay in making steps toward the settlement may become a possible threat to this process. He writes, "Fear and hope are twin brothers. As hopes rise, so do fears. But this time, it seems, Turkey has also mobilized reason, which can manage fears."

As Türköne implies, there is an ongoing battle between hope and fear in Turkey when it comes to addressing the Kurdish

question. Hasan Cemal describes such psychological difficulty by giving an example from his experience after his interview with Karayilan in Qendil. Since his interview, Cemal has been subject to many accusations of conspiring with the PKK. According to Cemal, President Gül, State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek, and Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan initially scheduled meetings with him following his trip to Qendil, but then suddenly either postponed or cancelled the appointments because they did not want to be victims of the same accusations. (*Milliyet*, May 30, 2009)

In addition to these political obstacles, tensions and violence still continue. Turkish forces recently attacked alleged PKK sites in Iraqi Kurdistan once again, and skirmishes between the PKK and the Turkish military continue in the southeast. At the same time, Prime Minister Erdoğan harshly criticized DTP-leader Ahmet Türk for calling upon Turkish security forces to silence their weapons. Türk fired back stating, "The prime minister is obviously trying to dilute the issue as he cannot openly declare that he has no political will."

Nevertheless, overall recent developments do indicate that changes are taking place in the attitudes of both the Turkish state and the PKK. Certainly, there are still very serious obstacles to progress. However, reactions to the peace process have so far been considerably positive and have created hope for the future in the relations between Kurds and Turks. It seems that Turkish politicians, especially those within the dominant Justice and

**"[O]verall recent developments do indicate that changes are taking place in the attitudes of both the Turkish state and the PKK. Certainly, there are still very serious obstacles to progress. However, reactions to the peace process have so far been considerably positive and have created hope for the future in the relations between Kurds and Turks."**

Development Party (AKP), are at least considering taking steps toward dialogue. The Turkish media, which in the past has frequently engaged in self-censorship (especially with respect to the controversial and emotionally-charged

Kurdish question), is speaking about the need for some resolution to this issue. And while the CHP, the standard bearer of Turkey's founding ideology, is viewed by some as less flexible on the Kurdish issue, CHP officials have recently met with DTP representatives for the first time.

For many years, Turkey's government and military have refused to engage in dialogue with the PKK. Indeed, the Turkish party line dictated that the issue of the PKK was one of "terrorism", and unrelated to issues of justice or equality within Turkey. At the same time, aggressive measures were taken against non-PKK representatives of the Kurdish people, including the DTP's predecessor parties active in Turkish municipal politics and the parliament. Now more than ever, change is being observed. Genuine dialogue is close to becoming a reality, and many would agree that this could not happen too soon as Turkey struggles to enter the European Union while the PKK is poised to enter its fourth decade as the outlawed voice of Kurdish aspirations in Turkey. 🌅

Servet Tosun holds a masters degree in Political Science from Rutgers University and currently resides in Istanbul. His research has been primarily focused on the Kurdish question and includes a comparative study between Turkish and Kurdish nationalism, the effect of globalization on Kurds, and the role of military in Turkish politics. Jeff Allan is co-founder of Kurdish Herald and a member of the editorial board.

# “I Would Return to Turkey to Contribute to Peace”

by Ozan Aksoy

Living in exile in Europe, Sivan Perwer is one of the most popular Kurdish figures and perhaps the most political figure in modern Kurdish music, as he has become the voice of a silent nation. He himself is well-aware of the situation, as the title of an interview he conducted with Halil Can (published in 1991) indicates: “My music alleviates my nation’s pains and sharpens their rage.”

This statement leads us to ponder the relationship between music and politics in the case of Kurds, Sivan Perwer and Kurdish music. For many years, his songs - even those about love - were banned in Turkey because they were sung in Kurdish. Cassettes of his music were passed from hand to hand, despite the risk of imprisonment. Those music stores that dared to sell his albums stored them in a special box, hidden from view. In 1976, he was compelled to leave Turkey and ended up in Germany, where he lives today. An exiled son of a divided and brutalized nation, Perwer has explained, “My music is my struggle.”

Born in Urfa (officially known today as Şanlıurfa, and also by local Kurds as Riha) in eastern Turkey as Ismail Aygun, Sivan Perwer took for himself a simple yet powerful Kurdish name, “Sivan”, meaning shepherd and “Perwer”, meaning protector. Perwer has been a songster for over forty years and strives to be a pioneer in his field. His music comprises traditional and modern compositions that are significant for Kurdish musicians because they convey a certain political and populist message in its protest lyrics conveyed by his powerful voice. On his numerous albums, Perwer has re-

made old Kurdish folkloric songs and written and produced his own original songs with topics ranging from independence to women’s rights. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he has performed almost exclusively in his mother tongue: Kurdish.

Beginning in late 2008, Perwer found himself the subject of a great deal of attention by Turks, as focus on the long-neglected Kurdish issue within Turkey’s border received an increasing amount of attention. Perwer, “The Pavarotti of Kurds” according to a Turkish newspaper, was invited to perform for the newly established official Kurdish TV channel called TRT-6, which began test programming in December 2008 and official broadcasting with the coming of the new year. TRT-6 is the first station to broadcast 24 hours in Kurdish by the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), the official government-owned broadcast company of the Republic of Turkey. Perwer’s response to the invitation has yet to be positive, as he has questioned the sincerity of the efforts and stated that he wanted to see more concrete peace efforts made by the Turkish government.

TRT-1, the most popular TV channel of the TRT network, broadcast a short documentary about the life of Sivan Perwer and his music on January 8, 2009. Mithat Bereket, a prominent Turkish documentary anchor, produced and presented the documentary on Perwer’s life and his music. The documentary explained that Perwer’s songs were, at a time, banned in Turkey and at that time one could be arrested for simply having his music cassettes.





Sivan Perwer, Live Concert - 2009

In February 2009, Perwer once again found himself the subject of considerable attention as the Kurdish question received further focus. On February 22, 2009, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan reminded the people of Diyarbakir that "Turkey has yet to reconcile with its history; too many Sivans and too many youngsters had to live apart from their families." This announcement was interpreted as another invitation to Perwer to return to his homeland. Perwer has called this development as another positive event but he said he is not yet planning to return to Turkey. His reluctance may be in part due to the still unresolved Kurdish question in Turkey.

In March 2009, Perwer's song *Keça Kurdan* (Kurdish Girls) grabbed headlines of the local newspapers in Adana, southern Turkey. Mehmet Arslan, editor of the local radio station Radio Dünya, was put on trial for having played a cover of the song, *Keça Kurdan*, performed by Kurdish singer, Aynur Doğan, on November 13, 2007 between the hours of 14:20-16:00 pm. He was accused of "inciting people to hatred and hostility" because of the lyrics of the song, which boldly calls for the empowerment of Kurdish women. On March 19, 2009,

the court acquitted Arslan, stating that "as the lyrics had been examined, no elements in the song [that] incite hatred or hostility among the people [have] been found." Mehmet Arslan and Radio Dünya had been going through another similar court case, which has to do with broadcasting of another one of Perwer's songs, "Mihemedo". The anti-terrorism unit of the Adana police had filed a complaint, but the Adana Second Criminal Court acquitted the radio station.

Stephen Blum in his *Composition* article of Grove Music Online tells readers that "...desires for compositions that would symbolize a nation's identity and aspirations have been expressed by countless participants in national movements and by culture ministries in both established and newly independent nations."

Sivan Perwer, for that matter, is the Kurdish pioneer of this effort in his compositions, performances, and albums. One could be claim that Perwer's music is a manifestation of an artist who felt the responsibility to call his nation to unite from exile. He calls upon fellow Kurds from a small recording studio in Germany

to leave internal disagreements aside. Given the significant developments in the first half of 2009, an optimist would hope that the second half of the year may bring Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation and, with it, extraordinary developments in Perwer's life and music. Indeed, Perwer's high-profile return to Turkey would have great emotional and symbolic value to the Kurdish people and would signify a realization by the Turkish state that the Kurdish identity does indeed exist and cannot be denied. Furthermore, it could certainly contribute to the future efforts towards reconciliation between Kurds and Turks sides in Turkey.

However, recurring attempts to ban Kurdish music in the public sphere in Turkey like the cases filed against Radio Dünya should serve as a reminder that reconciliation is not going to come easily.

Ozan Aksoy a PhD candidate for Ethnomusicology at the Graduate Center of City University of New York. Aksoy is currently working on his dissertation project, which deals with the relationships between the transformation of Kurdish music and the emergence of Kurdish nationalism among the Diaspora musicians in the last two decades.



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# The Persecution of Kurdish Political Activists in Iran

by Sayeh Hassan

**Iran** has undoubtedly become one of the International Community's most discussed countries in the world. The Islamic Republic's pursuance of nuclear technology has raised concerns but has also overshadowed perhaps the more concerning and most serious issues. Under the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the rate of executions in Iran has risen to one of the highest in the world. From a positive perspective, the execution of juvenile offenders has garnered a great deal of attention from nongovernmental organizations such as Human Rights Watch. However, it is important to note that still such attention has not been proportionately directed towards the persecution and execution of Kurdish prisoners in Iran.

The persecution of Kurdish activists is extremely widespread and many of these activists are sentenced to death after unjust trials that take only minutes. Furthermore, the intensity of the persecution of the Kurds has been concertedly masked by the leadership in Tehran.

At present, there are a number of specific cases in which Kurdish activists have been sentenced to face imminent execution after short show-trials because of their political activities.



### **Mohammad Sadiq Kaboudvand**

Mr. Sadiq Kaboudvand is a well known Kurdish human rights activist who founded the Kurdistan Human Rights Organization (HROK) in 2005.

He was arrested on July 1st 2007 and was charged with, "acting against national security through founding HROK", and as well, "wide spread propaganda against the state by disseminating news", "opposing Islamic penal laws by publicizing punishments such as stoning and executions", and "advocating on behalf of political prisoners".

In a letter written to the United Nations General Secretary Mr. Ban Ki-Moon on December 12th 2008, Mr. Kaboudvand highlighted the oppression and persecution of Kurdish people in Iran as follows: "Although the Kurdish people consist of less than 15% of the Iranian population, they also make up about half of the number of people executed and have [been] subjected to political persecution in the past 10 years. Currently about 50% of the political prisoners consist of Kurds."

Mr. Kaboudvand has been sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment and his sentence has been upheld by the Islamic Appeal court.

On January 23rd 2009 Mr. Kaboudvand received the Hellman/Hammett grant which is awarded by Human Rights Watch to persecuted writers. It has been reported by reliable sources that he is in need of urgent medical care.



### **Farzad Kamangar**

A well known teacher and human rights activist – is one of the Kurdish prisoners facing execution. Mr. Kamangar was arrested in July 2006 and was charged shortly after for allegedly holding membership in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). However, according to his lawyer, there is absolutely no evidence to support this charge. He was sentenced to death on February 25th 2008, and his sentence is currently under appeal.

In a letter written in 2008, Mr. Kamangar highlighted the torture he was subjected to during his interrogations. In his letters he states: "They took me to a room and as they were interviewing me they asked me about my ethnicity. When I told them that I was of the Kurdish Ethnicity, they lashed my entire body. They also lashed me because of the Kurdish music, which I had saved on my mobile phone." Mr. Kamangar is currently imprisoned in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison and is at risk of imminent execution.



### **Habibollah Latifi**

Another well known student activist who faces the death sentence is Mr. Habibollah Latifi. Mr. Latifi is a 26 years old student who was arrested on October 23rd 2007 in the city of Sanandaj. He was convicted of, "endangering state security" and was sentenced to death on July 3rd 2008, in closed court, without the presence of his lawyer. His death sentence was upheld by the court of appeal on January 29th 2009.

It has also been reported that Mr. Latifi was tortured and ill-treated while in detention. According to Defend International, he is currently in a terrible physical condition.

**Although the Kurdish people consist of less than 15% of the Iranian population, they also make up about half of the number of people executed and have [been] subjected to political persecution in the past 10 years.**

"Whether it is an act as simple as the preservation of Kurdish language and culture, or the organizing of peaceful associations that aim to highlight human rights issues in Iran, Kurdish women and men, children and seniors, bravely endure torture and imprisonment merely as a result of supporting democracy."

### More Political Prisoners

There are at least 11 other Kurdish political prisoners who are currently facing the death sentence. Unfortunately, their cases have not received much publicity or international attention.

Ms. Zeynab Jalaliyan (aged 27), Mr. Ehsan Fatahiyan (aged 27), Mr. Shirkuh Moarefi (aged 30) and Mr. Anwar Rostami have all been convicted of being a "Mohareb" (enemy of God) for their alleged involvement with Kurdish oppositional groups and have all been sentenced to death.

Mr. Ramezan Ahmad and Mr. Farhad Chalesh are two other individuals who were sentenced to death in January of 2009 on charges of being members of the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK). They are both currently being held in the Orumiyyeh Prison.

Some of the other individuals currently on death row include Mr. Fasih Yasamini, Mr. Arsalan Evliyayi, Mr. Anwar Hossein Panahi, Mr. Rostam Arkiya and Mr. Ali Heydariyan. Unfortunately, there is very little known about the personal circumstances of these individuals.

Unfortunately, even the more well-known cases mentioned have garnered far too little discussion internationally and world leaders have failed to condemn the Islamic Republic of Iran for its human rights violations. Thousands of Kurdish citizens in Iran have displayed resistance in response to the brutality of the regime. Whether it is an act as simple as the preservation of Kurdish language and culture, or the organizing of peace-

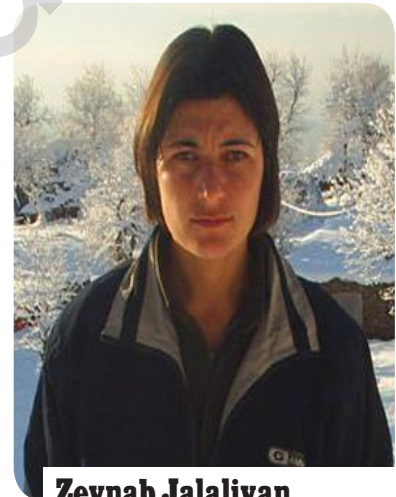
ful associations that aim to highlight human rights issues in Iran, Kurdish women and men, children and seniors, bravely endure torture and imprisonment merely as a result of supporting democracy; a freedom, which should be given without question and should be protected and encouraged by the government, rather than violated, stripped away, and brutally repressed.

Elements within the International Community, and in particular the United States under President Obama's directive, have recently expressed more willingness to engage in direct discussions with Iran over the nuclear issue, without taking into consideration a

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**Ehsan Fatahiyan**



**Zeynab Jalaliyan**



# NATURAL ALLIANCE

By Hayder al-Khoei

Imam Ali Shrine Najaf, Iraq- Courtesy of Hayder al-Khoei



**I**t was one of the most famous attacks against the British after the end of World War I. 200 Kurdish rebels joined forces with 400 Arab Shia rebels, led by Sheikh Hadi al-Makdoor, and attacked a British post in southern Iraq just before dawn. It was a surprise attack and the rebels overran the British barracks

and killed over 300 enemy soldiers while capturing more than 100 British-Indians. This particular Shia-Kurdish attack against the British was immortalised by a famous Arab who shouted after the battle in poetic prose "Two-thirds of paradise is for our Hadi, and one-third is for kaka Ahmad and his Kurds!"

The strong political and military alliance between the Shia and Kurds goes back to

the early 20th Century, when both groups were marginalized by the occupying British forces. In April 1920, after the League of Nations granted Britain a mandate over Iraq, mass demonstrations spread across the country. When Shia rebels in Samawa fought against the British, the great Kurdish leader Sheikh Mahmoud Barzanji sent his troops to the south to fight alongside the Shia.



When discussing Shia-Kurdish relations, one has to always bear in mind that the Kurds are an ethnic group and the Shia, a religious sect, and indeed, while the majority of Kurds are Sunni, there is a significant Shi'a Kurdish minority. However, the Shia Kurds integrate into Kurdish society more so than Shia Arabs do into Arab society (with its heavily Sunni majority), because the latter place much more emphasis on religion than ethnicity. A Shia Arab in Saudi Arabia, for example, will always be marked as a Shia first. The Kurds in Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq make comparatively less of a distinction between themselves regardless of religion or sect, or even borders drawn up by the British.

After Gertrude Bell advised the British to add the Ottoman Vilayet (or superprovince comprised of a number of local areas) of Mosul to the newly created state of Iraq, the Kurds were effectively made homeless. The oil-rich region of Kurdistan was key to protecting British interests in the region. The Shia on the other hand, who constitute a majority of the Iraqi people, were forced to live under the rule of the Hijazi Prince Faisal, who later became King of Iraq. Bell, of course, knew the Sunni Arabs were only a minority in Iraq, but she viewed the Shia as extremists and a government formed by them would be, to quote her, "the very devil". Some positions in the newly established Kingdom did go to the Shia, but it was mainly the Sunni Arab elite who effectively controlled Iraq until the recent US-led invasion in 2003. Between the founding of the Kingdom and the US-led invasion in 2003, many coups and counter-coups took place and the government in Baghdad was changed

**"When Shia rebels in Samawa fought against the British, the great Kurdish leader Sheikh Mahmoud Barzani sent his troops to the south to fight alongside the Shia."**

several times however it was always the minority ruling over the majority. The Kurds, like the Shi'a, remained more or less disenfranchised within the Iraqi political structure.

Another factor which facilitates the Shia-

Kurdish alliance is the effect of Sufism on the Kurdish culture. Many Kurds, including their current political leaders, PUK Secretary General and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, of the Qadiri order, and KDP and Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani, of the Naqshabandi order, have Sufi backgrounds and this makes them naturally more tolerant of the Shia, especially due to the special status given to Prophet Mohammed's

**"In 1965, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Mohsin al-Hakim issued a fatwa that made it strictly forbidden for the Shia to fight the Kurds... The religious decrees were copied and distributed all over Iraq in various street corners and buildings."**

cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib.

After repeated negotiations and skirmishes, with still with no homeland to call their own, the Kurds, led by Mulla Mustafa Barzani, declared war in 1961 against Abdul Karim Qassim, the military leader who overthrew Iraq's monarchy and established the Republic three years earlier.

After yet another military coup in Baghdad, Abdul-salam Arif became the new President in 1963. He stepped up the war effort in Kurdistan and, in the mid-60's, a particularly bloody campaign followed, leading to thousands of deaths from both sides. Although many of the officers in the Iraqi army were Sunni Arab from Mosul, the majority of soldiers were Shia, and they could be influenced by the marja'iyah – the undisputed spiritual leaders of Iraq's Shia – in Najaf. In 1965, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Mohsin al-Hakim issued a fatwa that made it strictly forbidden for the Shia to fight the Kurds. Ayatollah Abul-Qasim al-Khoei and other Shia scholars who had the authority to issue fatwas also did so. The religious decrees were copied and distributed all over Iraq in various street corners and buildings. The result was that many of the Shia soldiers in the army deliberately aimed above or below

their Kurdish targets to pretend they were obeying orders from Baghdad but, at the same time, following their spiritual leaders in Najaf. **ISSUE 2**

Two decades later, during the Iraq-Iran war, the Shia and Kurds again fought side-by-side against a common enemy. In 1986, the Badr Brigade and Peshmerga carried out numerous joint operations along the Iraq-Iran border. In 1991, following Saddam's expulsion from Kuwait, it was the joint effort of the Shia and Kurdish rebels that almost unseated the Ba'ath Party. However, their revolt failed as the cease-fire negotiations between Iraq and the US banned Saddam from using fixed-wing aircraft, which effectively gave Saddam permission to use helicopter gunships against the rebels. Soon the rebellion was brutally suppressed and hundreds of thousands were massacred.

The Shia-Kurdish alliance became stronger as the years went by as Iraq's various opposition groups worked on and off with one another toward regime change in their homeland, and after the fall of Saddam in 2003 it was a Kurdish-Shia political alliance that formed the basis of the Iraq's government after democratic elections.

The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (now re-styled the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq) was the most-powerful Shia body at the time, and they share the Kurds' ambitions for a Federal Republic which gives Kurds and the Shia a measure of legally-sanctioned self-rule over autonomous oil-rich regions in the north and south respectively.

The future does not seem to be so bright now as the Shia themselves are split between those who still want strong local governments in the south (Hakim) and others who prefer a strong central government in Baghdad (Maliki). Moqtada al-Sadr, another major Shia player, is not so clear-cut on this issue. He is generally considered to be opposed to federalism, though he has hinted support for self-governing regions if the US forces leave Iraq. At the same time, many Shia are now asking why the Kurds, who already have their own parliament in three majority Kurdish provinces in northern Iraq, can control ministries and a large bloc of the national parliament in Baghdad. They see it as Iraq's own 'West-Lothian Question'. 🌺

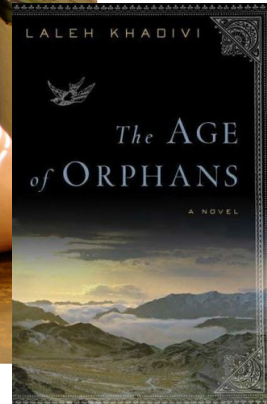
Hayder al-Khoei is a public relations assistant at the Al-Khoei Foundation, a charity organization set up by his grandfather Ayatollah Abul-Qasim al-Khoei. He is also currently pursuing a degree in Politics and International Relations.



Celebrate a Kurdish Writer  
**Laleh Khadivi**  
*The Age of Orphans*

by Natsumi Ajiki

**Ms. Laleh Khadivi**, the winner of the 2008 Whiting Writers' Award with her first novel, *the Age of Orphans*, was born in Esfahan, Iran in 1977 to a father of Kurdish descent and an Esfahani mother. Her family left the country at the onset of the Islamic Revolution in 1977, arriving in the United States three years later. A native of nowhere in particular, her upbringing was nomadic, moving to cities as various as Toronto, Connecticut, New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, London, San Juan, Atlanta and Warsaw. She received a BA in Political Science from Reed College and worked as a documentary filmmaker for four years in New York, directing the film 900 Women for Gabriel Films in



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underwent a disruptive transition where people were suddenly forced to pledge their authority to nation/state rather than to their regional tribe or people. As more independent and defiant than most tribes, the Kurds were reluctant to do so in Iran, Iraq and Turkey. The history of nation-building process and its influence on the life of Kurds ultimately inspired Ms. Khadivi to expand her imaginations and write the novel: What if there was a Kurd who did forgo his Kurdish heritage to become a 'citizen' of Iran? What kind of man would that be? What sort of toll would that take on a human soul? How deep do our allegiances lie?

*"Ms. Khadivi's desire was to conjure a much older world... a world that does not exist, by using her imagination to create a mythical geography as the setting for the story."*

2000. She earned an MFA from Mills College in 2006 and served as the Carl Djerassi Fiction Fellow at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She is now the 2007-2009 Fiction Fellow at Emory University.

The novel, *The Age of Orphans*, is a powerful historical novel as she relied heavily on history, photographs, interviews and her travels to Iran. Ms. Khadivi's desire, however, was to conjure a much older world, a world that does not exist, by using her imagination to create a mythical geography as the setting for the story.

Though there are political elements throughout the story, Ms. Khadivi's utmost interest in her novel is to tell a story about a man who, in his lifetime, is born into a tribe and dies in a nation, as a citizen of that nation. The background of the novel, *The Age of Orphans*, takes place in the legacy of the nation building process of the 1900's in the Middle East when the British and French molded the region in order to easily manage and influence. In such process, many tribal populations, including the Kurds,

Ms. Khadivi's novel is not limited about the Kurds and their isolated history. Her deep intention is to tell a story about a man torn, a man who cannot decide how to be loyal or who to be loyal to, and this is a dilemma people face all over the world. In her own words, Ms. Khadivi told *Kurdish Herald* that she hopes that "readers could read the story, learn about the difficulties faced by Kurds during this period but ultimately understand that we are all torn between one loyalty and the next and how artificial nationality actually is."

After publishing her novel, *The Age of Orphans*, Ms. Khadivi has found many people who are interested in the various struggles and victories of the Kurdish populations. As a writer and writing teacher at numerous universities, she hopes that more Kurdish literature should be translated and published all over the world.

Ms. Khadivi beautifully sends a message to the new generation of Kurdish writers, "It is often the case that through fiction and stories you can access a more powerful and affecting truth."



**LETTERS OF THE DIASPORA**  
FROM QUEBEC, CANADA:

*The Anfal Chronicler, Khalid Sulaiman*



Mr. Khalid Sulaiman, Iraq Memory Foundation

*By Vahal A. Abdulrahman*

**T**he word “Anfal”, meaning “The Spoils of War” was supposed to remain a 7th century Arabic term, immortalized by the eighth Surah of the Qur’an. In the late 1980s, however, Saddam Hussein resurrected the term to label his genocidal campaign against rural Kurdistan. I recently spoke to an Anfal survivor and expert from Quebec, Canada by way of Garmian, Iraqi Kurdistan; Mr. Khalid Sulaiman, in a rather depressing way, defined the Anfal for me as, “that moment during which I lost the taste of life.” For 182,000 Iraqi Kurds, including scores of immediate relatives of Khalid, the Anfal simply meant the end of life through a meticulous and systemic operation commencing with being trucked in military transportation vehicles and ending in the mass graves of the deserts of Iraq.

The district of Garmian is often referred to by Khalid as "Anfalistan"; it was here where the young Khalid Sulaiman watched his fellow countrymen, including members of his immediate family line up to get into the back of trucks and be taken away never to be seen again. The dead shared an identity; they were Kurds, insofar as the Saddam regime was concerned, that alone qualified them to be the "The Spoils of War." On the tombstone of Khalid's childhood, the word "Anfal", and only that word, reads as a reminder of a time when the people of Iraqi Kurdistan underwent the wrath of Arab nationalism mixed with a deafeningly silent international community that included – but by no means was limited to – the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Today, Khalid Sulaiman resides in Canada where he works as an editor for *al Dhakira* newsletter, a publication of the Iraq Memory Foundation. The soft-spoken Khalid, traumatized by the hatred of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party led by Saddam Hussein, described the Anfal as the type of cruelty that humiliates humanity. That statement instantly reminded me of Elie Wiesel who once wrote, "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

So, thousands of miles away from Anfalistan, Khalid, from his home in Quebec, decided not to be silent and, through the documents of the Iraq Memory Foundation, he tries to tell - in Arabic - the story of the Anfal to an audience that is frequently either brainwashed by Arabist propaganda or deliberately remains ignorant of the bloody facts of history. Behind the Saddam who deified the Arabs and their civilization and who swore to liberate Jerusalem, there was a genocidal man who took the lives of at least 182,000 men, women and children whose only crime was that they were born Kurds."

I asked Khalid what he wanted the world to know about the Anfal, and he instantly replied, "I want the Arab and Muslim worlds to recognize this genocide." Khalid, who chronicles the Anfal details in Arabic and has published a number of articles and books on the subject, believes that Saddam conducted this operation in name of Muslims by using an exclusively Qur'anic term as the name of the campaign. Why there was no outrage as hundreds of thousands of Kurds were sent to their deaths in the name of the Qur'an is less important to Khalid than why there is no recognition of that cruelty today in spite of all the undeniable evidence.

Khalid Sulaiman, the eloquent multilingual Iraqi Kurd who lived through 1980s in Kurdistan, appreciates that the new Iraq recognizes the Anfal as an act of genocide but is worried about how some Iraqis to this day link the Anfal to the Iraq-Iran war and see it as a mere incident of the war.

I asked Khalid about the number of dead during the Anfal, fully accepting the official Kurdish claim of 182,000, and he told me that that number may be right but it is possible that it may be a little more than that. Khalid said that in his small village consisting of only 30 households, at least 80 men, women and children were killed. That is an addition to at

least 4500 villages in Iraqi Kurdistan – most of which were much bigger than his village – that were demolished and their residents Anfalized.

On Darfur, I asked Khalid whether he thinks there is an adequate Kurdish condemnation for the genocide in Sudan. He immediately said, "Condemnation alone is not enough," and added that Iraqi Kurds who constantly complain about the Arab/Muslim silence over the Anfal should think of the day when the people of Darfur express similar concerns. Indeed the tragedy of Darfur is an Iraqi Kurdish issue as much as it is a Sudanese issue, and as much as it is an issue affecting all of humankind.

Khalid Sulaiman who admits that he is drowned in the testimonies and documents of the Anfal campaign lives in Canada, yet his heart is still in that small village in the Garmian district where the brutality of the Saddam regime lives with him every moment of every day. When I asked Khalid what he thinks the most about, he told me in a powerful tone, "the last moment"; the last moments of the dead from the Anfal, what they must have been thinking as they were collectively executed.

Between Khalid Sulaiman and Iraqi Kurdistan lie oceans and continents. Nonetheless, the word "Anfal", which was meant to be remain a mere Qur'anic reference, lives with him every minute of every hour of every day. 🌟